

ADDRESS

OF THE BAPTIST GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF
VIRGINIA, JUNE 4TH, 1863.

DEAR BRETHREN:—Again have we assembled in our annual convention with the cloud of war still darkening the land. We humbly recognize in this desolating scourge the tokens of God's just displeasure against us for our sins; and although we have reason to adore his goodness, that in the midst of deserved wrath He hath remembered mercy, and saved us from the hand of those who hate us, not humbling us before our enemy, yet, how grievous has been our chastening!—Thousands of once happy homes are made desolate; at thousands of hearth-stones tears are falling and anguished hearts are breaking; our country has become the land of Rama; throughout its borders is heard a voice of "lamentation and weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and will not be comforted because they are not." Still, whilst we "despise not the chastening of the Lord," we take courage, and, in reference to the public welfare and the common cause, can say with his servant of old, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." We behold in the fiery trial, through which we are passing, that baptism of sufferings by which men and nations are disciplined for the work appointed to them.

We have thought it meet, at this momentous crisis of our history, in which the interest of our country and of the church are so deeply involved, to address you, somewhat at length, upon the state of the country, the character of the war, and our duties as patriots and Christians.

Though God in scourging us has used the hand of a wicked nation as His avenging instrument, we are daily more convinced of the righteousness of our cause, and have abiding faith, through His favor, of ultimate, and we trust not distant deliverance from our ruthless enemy. We are contending not only for political liberty, but for rights of conscience, assailed by fanaticism in the name of religion. The cause and purpose of his atrocious war are no longer disguised. The mask is thrown aside and the long-cherished purpose of the foe is openly avowed. We would speak here of the origin of this war, because

its history is so intimately connected with that of the church, and teaches such a fearful lesson of the danger of spiritual pride and religious intolerance.

Not designing politicians, but those who claim to be the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus—ministers of the reconciliation—heralds of the gospel of peace, have sown the seeds of that whirlwind which is devastating the land. It is now many years since our Northern brethren, in their fierce hostility to the institution of domestic slavery, deaf alike to the voice of reason and the authority of Scripture, to the pleadings of patriotism and the claims of Christian charity, by their fiery and intolerant fanaticism, furrowed deep and broad the line of separation—thrusting us from their communion as unworthy to labor with them in the fields of Christian benevolence and gospel enterprise. Thus was planted the germ of certain and inevitable disunion. For, how can a people harmonize as fellow-citizens, who, because of discordant moral standards, cannot co-operate either as fellow-Christians or fellow-philanthropists? Even the political philosopher could have taught them that there is a sense of honor, a sentiment of self-respect, which is with nations as with men, the strongest motive of action, and an insult to which admits of no atonement;—that no ties of kindred blood, no common inheritance of glorious memories, no community of political traditions and ideas, no dreams of empire, no earthly interest can induce sovereign and independent States to remain in intimate league with those who have pronounced against them a decree of moral outlawry. But to the Christian, who is proclaimed a felon in the house of his God, smitten at the very horns of the altar—his name cast out as evil,—the dear old Zion itself in which he claims his heavenly birth, denounced as a synagogue of Satan—there remains but the alternative, either to sit in sackcloth as a penitent for sin, or in conscious innocence, casting from him the shackles of such a spiritual bondage, to “stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made him free.” It were treason to the Lord that bought him to “give place by subjection” for an hour to such false brethren; nay, it is a paramount duty to sever every tie which unites him with those who, in calumniating him, dishonor the name of the Lord Christ.

At length the evil seed bore its bitter fruit—the natural and necessary catastrophe came. But when Southern Christians, already repelled from the fellowship of their Northern brethren, asking themselves, “how shall two walk together unless they be agreed,” sought by a peaceful political separation, and a new confederacy of homogeneous States, to end the ceaseless and mischievous agitation, and secure to themselves the unmolested enjoyment of their institutions, their rights of conscience, and Christian liberty, the Northern churches rose in anger, and, with united voice proclaimed, like the Egyptian taskmasters, “We will not let this people go.” Yes, those who for long years had, from pulpit, press and platform, denounced the Union as a “league with sin,” the Constitution as a “covenant of death,” and

groaned over the national flag itself as an emblem of the "stripes of bondage," and who declared their consciences burdened because a common citizenship with us made them partakers of our sin of slavery, now enshrine that union, that constitution, and that flag, as the very gods of their idolatry, and refusing to let us, by a peaceful separation, relieve at once their consciences and our own, incite against us a bloody, relentless and unscrupulous war.

Dear brethren, we record these things more in sorrow than in anger, and under a sense of profound humiliation, at such an example of the deceitfulness of the human heart. The history of Christian nations, we believe, furnishes no parallel. When hereafter, as apologists for our holy religion, we shall cite the French revolution with its reign of terror, to show how all the philanthropic schemes of godless philosophers and humanitarians are but a delusion and a snare, the sneering infidel will point us to this atrocious war, waged in the name of Christ, by decendants of the Puritans, by high-priests of philanthropy, the once meek advocates of peace, who would scarce admit the lawfulness of defensive war.

Let us study this lesson with heart-searchings for ourselves, striving to know what manner of spirit we are of; let us, whilst we condemn, pity the delusion of our brethren who have become our persecutors,—not in the spirit which says, "Stand aside, for I am holier than thou," but, with humble hearts, earnestly praying for them and for ourselves, lest we be also tempted and overcome of evil. "Let us not be high-minded, but fear."

In addressing you upon our duties as Christians in the present crisis, we turn first to our brethren in the army.

Soldiers—Brethren: Our hearts burn within us when we think of you, our brave defenders, who have so often stood, a living wall of fire, between us and the ruthless invader. We cannot forget—a grateful country can never forget, your faithful services. When we think of you, as with scant and coarse soldier's fare, in tattered garments, with unshod and bleeding feet, you toil along the weary march, scaling rugged mountains, threading tangled forests, fording rivers, struggling through miry marshes, shivering at the comfortless bivouac, or tossed with fever on the hospital couch; and know that you endure all this toil, privation and suffering, with a faith and patience more heroic even than your dauntless daring amid the storm of battle, we thank God and take courage; for we say, surely He hath caused His presence to go with our armies. Brethren, you have place in our hearts. We remember you in the sanctuary, and at the family altar, mingling our prayers with the loved ones at home, that God will have you in His holy keeping; that your health and lives may be precious in His sight; and that every battle-field shall inscribe your banners with such victories, as shall win a peace from our reluctant foes and restore you to your homes. But far more earnestly than for all these, do we beseech Him to graciously keep you in the way of

righteousness, and cause you to "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing."

Soldier of the cross! remember that you have a victory to achieve, a reward to gain, an inheritance to enter upon, transcendently more glorious than any to which your country-calls you. The captain of our salvation has enlisted us for a warfare whose "weapons are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. And there is no discharge in that war; neither does it allow any relaxation of discipline. Religion makes the same demands upon us in the camp as at home. The perils which environ us, far from lessening the obligation of Christian duty, rather require us to walk more "circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

But, farther, dear brethren, have you seriously considered what a field of labor has been providentially appointed to you? how great a work lies before you? No pastor throughout the land has access to such a plenteous harvest. Think of it; the ends of the Confederacy meet together in the army congregation—it is as it were a gathering of nations for you to plead with, and the missionary field lies around your camp-fires. Not to the army chaplain, the occasional preacher, or colporter, is it exclusively or chiefly given to leaven this great mass. The task is yours; upon you mainly will rest the responsibility: and if the eyes of the world are upon you as the champions of your country's cause, much more are you "made a spectacle to angels and men" as witnesses for Christ. As soldiers, your individuality, your merits or demerits, may be merged in the corps to which you belong; as Christians, on the contrary, you are "like a city set on a hill which cannot be hid." You profess to "have been with Jesus," and men will note what you "have learned of him," for you are his "living epistles, to be known and read of all men." Seeing then that you have received such a charge, and that your daily life is surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness? Watch therefore unto prayer, giving all diligence that you may approve yourselves the servants of Christ, "by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left," It is not enough that you abstain from evil; you must do good: your piety should be active and aggressive. You can efficiently aid the minister of Christ and the tract-distributor in their labors of love; and, more intimately and unobtrusively than they, can you speak a word in season to your comrade, in the mess or on the march, by the camp-fire or beside the sick-bed,—speak to him when his heart is grateful in joy, or subdued by sorrow: when his dewy eye tells you that the letter from home has awakened touching memories, thoughts

perhaps of that holy thing, a mother's love and prayers. Many are your opportunities to speak, as others cannot, the fitting word at the right time. Have you a prayer-meeting in your company or regiment? If not, seek till you have found, if it be but two or three, who can solemnly meet together in the name of Jesus, to commune with each other and with their Lord at the throne of the heavenly grace. God has already greatly blessed this instrumentality among our soldiers, and if it more abounded, we doubt not the Spirit of glory and of God would descend in Pentecostal seasons upon our army.

Finally, brethren, we exhort you in the words of a holy apostle, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

It is sad to think that this address may find many of you prostrate with disease, or disabled by wounds, in the hospital, or among strangers, far from home. This is among your sorest trials. The sense of duty, the active employments and responsibilities of the service, which, in health, buoy up your spirits to endure cheerfully privations and toils, stay not the languor and helplessness of the sick-bed. And though kind nurses may attend you, though some of those many noble-hearted women, who have relieved the darkest scenes of this hour of trial by the beauty of their love, may hover like ministering angels around your couch, still you feel a void is there. It is now that you would lean your head again, as in the hour of childhood's weakness, upon a fond mother's arm, or upon that tender bosom which has hid its life and love in yours; you long for a sister's gentle touch and sweet soothing voice; or to hear the little prattlers at your bedside, calling you father and brother. And yet, dear Christian brother, there is one standing by who loves you more than all these, saying to you, "Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid;" one who will place around you his everlasting arms, and press you to his great loving heart—the heart that bled for you. The Crucified One draws nigh to you. Oh! lean upon Him, for He is a "friend that sticketh closer than a brother." It is He "who forgiveth all thy iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction." He speaks to you in such words as these: "Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." Why then should you doubt or fear? In the absence of earthly comforts find them all in Jesus; and leave all with Him; assured that He will richly supply your every need. Say to your troubled heart: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." If the Shepherd and Bishop of your soul be with you, the couch of affliction may be made to glorify Him in you, and if He goes before, you can say with the Psalmist: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear

as evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."

Whilst our much-enduring brethren in the army are standing between us and the foe, we who remain at home have duties no less serious and imperative to fulfill. We, too, have trials to endure, sacrifices to make, abuses to abate, and evils to encounter. Physical suffering, the discomforts of the camp, and carnage of the battle-field, are not the most grievous evils of war. History teaches us the mournful lesson, that seasons of great public calamity are usually signalized also by great public demoralization. Nor is this war destined to furnish an exception to the rule. The worldly-mindedness, relaxation of morals, and self-seeking which are wont to characterize scenes of civil war, pestilence, and famine, are rife among us. Painfully prominent among the evils of the times is the eager greed of gain, fostering a wide-spread and unscrupulous spirit of extortion. With emphasis, does the experience of to-day testify to the truth of the apostolic warning, that "the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Christian brethren, can nothing be done to rebuke this spirit, which is causing so many to "fall into temptation and a snare," and thereby lessen those exorbitant prices of articles of prime necessity, which are menacing greater danger to us than the arms of the invader? It is evident that, whilst there is no lack of provisions in the land, yet this exaction is embarrassing the government, impairing the public credit, depreciating the currency, and creating distress among the people which may even result in disaffection, for hunger knows no allegiance. There is a miserable fallacy about the inexorable "law of trade," with which men strive to quiet their consciences—a law wholly inapplicable to a beleaguered city, or a blockaded country. We will not discuss here, however, the laws of political economy. We urge rather the claims of Christian philanthropy and patriotism. What are our obligations? Have we not pledged each other "our lives, fortunes, and our sacred honor," in the public defence? It is a solemn compact—a partnership of national defence, in which the duties are divided. A half million of our able-bodied men, the elect of the land, in the flower of youth and vigor of manhood, have agreed to leave their all, their pleasant homes, wives and children, and the endearments of domestic life, to forego the pursuit of gain, abandon the occupation which to multitudes was the sole means of livelihood for themselves and families, to go forth, not as mercenary soldiers, for their pittance of pay suffices not for their expenses, but as self-sacrificing patriots, enduring all the hardships and dangers of an ill equipped army against a foe whose number tripples theirs—all this they agree to do, that they may stand upon the borders of our country as a protecting wall, enabling you who remain at home to provide in security the means of subsistence for yourselves and them. Well and nobly have they redeemed their pledge

at the cost of thousands of precious lives; and now, brethren, will you meet your part of the obligation, and share the burden? Or does the "law of trade" mean that, because these half million of producers, by abandoning their pursuits and withdrawing from competition with you, have left all the production in your hands, you will make gain of their necessities? Does this "law of trade" mean, that when you pay your brave defenders their miserable pittance, they shall receive their \$11 per month in Confederate money as at par with gold, but when they or their families would purchase the means of subsistence, the \$11 shall be worth only \$1? Is not this coining the blood of our martyr-heroes and the tears of their widows and orphans into sordid gold—or rather, into the Nemesis of this grasping avarice may yet convert into bundles of worthless rags? Brethren, these things ought not so to be; and a conviction both of their unrighteousness and impolicy should induce every Christian and patriot to seek a remedy. It is demonstrably for the interest of all, that by a reduction of prices our currency should be approximated to a par value. Many of our brethren have amassed fortunes during the war in the legitimate enterprise of business. May we not ask of them, as the part of wisdom and Christian charity, and as a thank offering to God, to seriously consider how their capital may be used to check the monopolist, and restore in our market something like a fair valuation of articles! Will not our brethren engaged in agriculture take this subject into prayerful consideration, and consult together for the attainment of this end? So wide-spread is the sense of the grievance, that we are confident an earnest effort made even by a few would find many helpers, and have great results. Men of the world will pronounce an appeal like this to be a sheer utopian scheme; but we make it in the confidence that out of 200,000 Christians in our State, many will be found both able and willing to put forth an effort which cannot fail to draw down upon it a blessing from the great Head of the church who loveth us all.

We know that we need not solicit your sympathy and hospitality towards the homeless and penniless refugee who has given up all rather than desert the cause of his country; nor invoke your kind attention to the sick and wounded, nor your generous contributions to supply the want of our soldiers in the field. Towards all these your liberality has abounded, and among the many glorious deeds which the history of this war shall chronicle, there will be no brighter page than that which records the story of this beneficence: and especially will millions of hearts, in coming generations, glow within them as they read of their labors of love and do homage to the virtues of the women of Virginia. We feel sure that not only will you continue to give out of your abundance, but that, should straitened circumstances come, you will share your scanty store with the needy patriot.—Whilst you thus honor the claims of philanthropy and patriotism, forget not your Christian obligations. We need not tell you that your

pastor will require for his support greatly enlarged contributions. Even an increased salary may be found inadequate. Let us then, in the fluctuating and uncertain state of things which characterizes these present evil times, recur to the primitive apostolic rule, and the former usage of our churches; and simply determine that the wants of our ministry shall be supplied. Let each church authorize and by its bounty enable its deacons to provide for the comfortable support of its pastor, that he may freely and "continually give himself to prayer and the ministry of the word."

In conclusion, brethren, while we trust that none of our enterprises of benevolence will be neglected, we especially solicit your liberal support for the work of army colportage, in giving the word of life and a religious literature to our soldiers. And to this end, as we know of no more efficient organ for disseminating Christian influence, we recommend large subscriptions to our religious journals for distribution in the army. Let every church determine that the soldiers who have gone from its neighborhood shall be regularly supplied with a package of this healthy literature. At home, let the most strenuous efforts be made to sustain your Sunday schools, more needed now than ever to supply the want of other instruction, and to guard youth against the evils of the times. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, but esteem it of the last importance to maintain sanctuary privileges, the regular preaching of the gospel, and the ordinances of God's house, that you may "dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty." And may great grace be upon us all, both to do and to suffer His will in all things.

